

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

burden at different epochs in the Church's history—especially in times of her greatest corruption—more frequently in the seclusion of the cloister or in the poor hovels of the peasantry. Catherine differs from such saints as Fina of San Gimignano and Lydwine of Schiedam, almost her contemporaries, or Rose of Lima in later times, inasmuch as this "existence of expiation" was only a small portion of her life's work; but the spirit that animated them in their sufferings was the same. This has been admirably expressed by a modern French writer, in the case of the young Dutch woman who was born in the very year that Catherine died: "She made expiation, even as the other saints of her age, for the souls in Purgatory, for the abomination of the schism, for the debauchery of the clergy and the monks, for the wickedness of the peoples and the kings; but, in addition to that obligation which she accepted of repairing the sins committed from one end of the Universe to the other, she had also the office laid upon her of being the scapegoat of her own country." Such an existence of expiation would be incomprehensible without a knowledge of the causes, the number, and the nature of the offences, to make reparation for which here on earth was, in some sort, her *raison d'être*.¹ For the salvation of others, Catherine was prepared to endure the very pains of Hell. "How could I be content, Lord," she prayed, "if any one of those who have been created to Thy image and likeness, even as I, should perish and be taken out of my hands? I would not in any wise that ever one should be lost of my brethren, who are bound to me by nature and by grace; I am fain that the old enemy should lose them all, and Thou gain them, to the greater praise and glory of Thy name. Better were it for me that all should be saved, and I alone (saving ever Thy charity) should sustain the pains of Hell, than that I should be in Paradise and all they perished damned; for greater honour and glory of Thy name would be." And she was answered by the Lord, as she secretly confessed to me: "Charity cannot be in Hell, for it would destroy it utterly; it were easier for Hell to be destroyed than for Charity

¹ J. K. Huysmans, *Sainte Lydwine de Schiedam*, pp. 61-65.